

CIA director opposes any budget exposure

By MURIEL DOBBIN
Washington Bureau of The Sun

Washington—William E. Colby, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, said in an interview he would flatly oppose even a broad disclosure of the intelligence budget on the grounds that it would yield information about sensitive operations.

"I could learn a lot about the KGB [the Soviet secret police] budget by studying year-to-year changes in its annual overall total," Mr. Colby said recently in his office at CIA headquarters at Langley, Va.

The CIA director is scheduled to testify today before the House intelligence committee as it continues its probe of the fiscal operations of espionage agencies.

He emphasized that he would not soften his objections to any changes in the current top-secret status of the CIA budget. Mr. Colby rejected the suggestion by members of Congress that at least the gross total be revealed, if not a line-by-line itemization of expenditures.

According to Mr. Colby, a careful analysis of an overall

figure would be dangerously revealing to those who knew precisely what they were looking for.

"A little bounce in the total from year to year can tell a lot. To disclose that figure would be explaining a great deal about the intelligence structure," the CIA director said.

He noted that there had been comparisons between the CIA budget and that of the now-defunct Atomic Energy Commission. Pointing to the growth of AEC disclosure over the years, he commented, "In 1947, the AEC had a one-line item. Last year it had 15 pages."

The CIA director added that he doubted that there would be as much attention paid to details revealed by the AEC as to information about the intelligence agency.

"At this time, the AEC could print the formula for the atomic bomb without arousing the same interest as there would be in anything at all about the CIA," he said wryly.

Mr. Colby, the first director who had to take to what might be termed the congressional speech circuit as the defender of his agency, said that it was "a strange way to run an intelligence operation."

His departure from the traditional secrecy of the espionage community, he conceded, was legitimate in that it was time for a re-examination of American intelligence needs.

The CIA, Mr. Colby said, had responded to the policy requirements of different administrations for the last three decades, operating as he put it, "under pressure and without very much control or supervision on some occasions."

Yet the director refused to agree with a recent prediction by Senator Frank Church (D., Idaho), chairman of the Senate intelligence committee, that the forthcoming report on political assassinations was likely to show the agency had acted like a "runaway rogue elephant."

"We took our policy drives from the political leadership of the country," Mr. Colby said. He thus reiterated the problem of chain of command, which congressional investigators have found so difficult to establish, especially in relation to any involvement of presidents in political assassination plots.

The CIA director refused to discuss the subject of involvement in what Senator Church has termed "murder plots," beyond pointing to a directive banning the agency from such activity.

Yet in reference to the current post-mortems on White House and congressional oversight of the conduct of covert operations, Mr. Colby offered the analogy of a general who gives a major an order to take a certain road.

"The general doesn't tell the major whether to walk on the right or the left side of the road. Some decisions are delegated. It may be a detail at the time. It may not be a detail in hindsight," he said obliquely.

Regarding the possibility of criminal prosecutions arising from any "mistakes" made by the CIA, Mr. Colby said he had "come across things that gave me problems." He had checked with Edward H. Levi, the Attorney General, and certain matters had been turned over to the Justice Department.

He indicated that among those matters was the testimony on CIA involvement in Chile given by Richard M. Helms, former CIA director, to the House Armed Services Committee. There have been continuing reports that Mr. Helms was less than candid in that sworn testimony.

Mr. Colby added, however, that he "did not think there was anything for which anyone could be convicted of a crime."

Trying to identify who did what, and precisely where responsibility lay, was not easy for the CIA in its self-examination any more than for Congress in its investigation, the director said.

"What we have now," Mr. Colby said, "is the new America looking at the old intelligence structure and contemplating changes which need to be made in it. The hardest chore I have is to bring out clearly the changes that have occurred in the intelligence service as well as to America."

He admitted there were morale problems at home and abroad in the intelligence service as a result of what he termed the "sensationalized" aspects of the congressional probe.

"If we had not had very strong minded people, this structure would have been shattered" Mr. Colby said.

He made no attempt to deny "mistakes and misdeeds," such as mail interception and drug experimentation programs now being publicized.

The mail opening, Mr. Colby said, was an example of a misguided belief by intelligence personnel that the practice lay within the general policy being followed.

But he singled out the drug experimentation, specifically the 1953 administering of LSD to Dr. Frank R. Olson, the Frederick biochemist who later killed himself, as "a tragedy."

"The Olson case was wrong," said the CIA director.